



## **Illuminare:**

A Student Journal in  
Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Studies

### **‘Recreation as Re-creation?’: Analyzing How Aboriginal Students Experienced and Reported Their Recreation Within Two Canadian Residential Schools**

Simon John Barrick

University of Waterloo

**Online Publication Date: April 20th, 2015**

Publication details, instructions for authors, and subscription information can be found at <http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/illuminare/>

Articles in this publication of the *Illuminare: A Student Journal in Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Studies* may be reproduced if 1) Used for research and educational purposes only, 2) Full citation (author, title, *Illuminare*, Indiana University, Vol. #, Issue #) accompanies each article, 3) No fee or charge is assessed to the user. All articles published in the *Illuminare* are open-access articles, published and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License.

# **‘Recreation as Re-creation?’: Analyzing How Aboriginal Students Experienced and Reported Their Recreation Within Two Canadian Residential Schools**

**Simon John Barrick**

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo  
Canada

## **Abstract**

This exploratory study examines how Aboriginal students experienced recreation within two Canadian residential schools. Using archival research and a qualitative, thematic analysis approach, two schools’ student publications, *The Mount Elgin Sputnik* and *The Wigwam News*, dated from 1946 to 1958 were analyzed to uncover Aboriginal students’ recreational experiences. Specifically, three research questions were addressed: (1) What role did recreation play in Canadian residential schools? (2) How did Aboriginal students experience recreation in these institutions? and (3) What values did students report from their recreational experiences? Results indicate substantial diversity within both the types of recreational activities students experienced and the values students’ reported surrounding these recreational pursuits. This study represents an entry point into better understanding recreation’s historic place within Canada’s residential school system. Overall, this study unpacks recreation’s diverse roles in two Canadian residential schools from a range of student perspectives.

---

**Keywords:** Recreation, Aboriginal Peoples, Aboriginal history, Residential schools, Archival research

**Address Correspondence to:** Simon John Barrick, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G1., E-mail: [simon.barrick@gmail.com](mailto:simon.barrick@gmail.com)

Recreation held and continues to hold a prominent place among Aboriginal Peoples residing in North America (Place & Livengood, 2010). Relevant academic research has explored recreation's place within the cultural existence of Aboriginal communities (Fox et al., 1998; Place & Livengood, 2010), as well as how recreation acts as a source of resistance (Forsyth & Heine, 2008) and improved health (Iwaski & Bartlett, 2006). Furthermore, any social research addressing Aboriginal Peoples residing in North America must also be situated within the Canadian residential school and American boarding school systems. Specifically, a thorough review of literature pertaining to the Canadian residential school system will follow. Broadly speaking, scholars have addressed the legacy of these systems (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1996; Grant, 1996; Furniss, 1995) and the lingering negative socio-economic and mental health impacts on residential school survivors (Elias et al., 2012; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003). Through this paper, these prominent topics will be addressed through exploring the intersections between Aboriginal Peoples and their recreational experiences within Canadian residential schools captured through student newspapers and yearbooks.

### **Literature Review**

#### **The History of Recreation within Aboriginal Communities in North America**

Literature exploring recreation and leisure among Aboriginal Peoples throughout North America helps to contextualize the role of recreation in Canadian residential schools. Aboriginal North American leisure perspectives include the history of recreation within Aboriginal communities in North America and cross-cultural recreational interactions between Aboriginal and Euro-North Americans.

Recreation and physical activity have always played a role in Aboriginal communities throughout North America. In general, the traditional Aboriginal way of life involved high levels of physical fitness due to their physically active lifestyles, which

included dancing and playing games (Place & Livengood, 2010). Dances and ceremonies played a significant role in Aboriginal communities and were performed for various reasons including for fertility, war, crop growth, hunting, death, and rebirth. (Place & Livengood, 2010). Active games were also common in Aboriginal communities and were divided in two categories: chance and dexterity. Games of chance included various dice and guessing games. Games of dexterity included archery, ball games, shooting, and darts (Place & Livengood, 2010). Overall, Aboriginal games differed based on gender. For instance, women avoided many of the recreational activities mentioned above, instead playing a game similar to field hockey, called Shinny or Double ball. This game was played with a ball and a stick with a curved end (Place & Livengood, 2010). The belief systems existing among many Aboriginal communities influenced their rationale for engaging in recreational activities. These belief systems involved the belief in harmony and possessing a holistic worldview, leading to a greater focus being placed on the will of the Spirits, rather than on winning or losing. Thus, Aboriginal recreation was connected to the holistic nature of their belief system and distinguished Aboriginal peoples from the European colonizers who had profoundly different recreational patterns and rationales (Place & Livengood, 2010).

#### **Aboriginal and Euro-North American Cross-cultural Recreational Practices**

Broadly speaking, early Euro-North American influences on Aboriginal recreation and leisure patterns were largely negative on both Aboriginal individuals and their cultural practices (Place & Livengood, 2010). European missionaries perceived the superstitious nature of some games, such as games used to heal sick people, negatively. As a result, missionaries sought to deter Aboriginal communities from participating in such activities (Place & Livengood, 2010). Despite these efforts, Aboriginal and Euro-North American leisure

activities blended together over time. For instance, early settlers began playing Aboriginal games such as lacrosse, wrestling, and running. Settlers also started using canoes, toboggans, and snowshoes (Place & Livengood, 2010). Simultaneously, Aboriginal communities inherited Euro-North American activities such as basketball, volleyball, and horse racing. This cross-cultural blending was significant in understanding how Aboriginal recreational patterns in North America changed after the introduction of European settlers. Place and Livengood (2010) illustrated this blending in their study of the recreational activities within the northern community of Wapakeka, Ontario, where Aboriginal Peoples engaged in activities such as hockey, square dancing, and holding potlucks. These activities had European origins and represented the decline of traditional Aboriginal games. However, this community maintained some Aboriginal customs, such as traditional dancing and festivities. Thus, Place and Livengood (2010) illustrated the complex interactions between both traditional Aboriginal and incoming Euro-North American recreational activities within one contemporary Aboriginal community in Northern Ontario.

### **A Brief History of the Canadian Residential School System**

Residential schools possess a long history in Canada. The first known Canadian Aboriginal boarding schools began in 1620 under the auspices of the Recollets, an order of Franciscans (Miller, 1996). Throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, various other attempts at Aboriginal residential schools were fostered. For instance, in 1820, Reverend John West, a member of the Evangelical Anglican organization, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), came to the Red River territory of present-day Manitoba and established a residential school (Miller, 1996). Missionaries at that time had to enter Aboriginal communities and recruit children to attend their institutions. It was not until 1884 that attendance became compulsory by

law for all Aboriginal children under the age of 16 to attend residential schools (Miller, 1996). As a component of the Numbered Treaties, many of which were created in the second half of the 19th century, Aboriginal schooling became an area of focus. Colonial official Alexander Morris, during the discussions surrounding Treaty 4 in 1874 stated, "The government agreed to schooling, but it was the Native negotiators who suggested it and insisted on its inclusion in the earliest treaties" (Miller, 1996, p. 98). In 1876, Indians at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, petitioned Ottawa for support to build a school for their band (Miller, 1996). Thus, educating Aboriginal children became a prominent issue for both the federal government and Aboriginal communities across Canada.

The historic relationship between the Europeans and Aboriginal Peoples in North America has been marked by the presence of residential schools, in varying forms. The Davin Report of 1879 represented a significant moment in the creation of a national residential school system. Nicholas Flood Davin, a journalist and defeated Tory candidate was commissioned by the federal government to write a report on Aboriginal education (Milloy, 1999). As part of his report, Davin travelled to America to tour various American boarding schools and meet with the founder and superintendent of the Carlisle Industrial School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Colonel Richard Henry Pratt. Davin was impressed by the organization and efficiency of the American boarding schools and recommended that a similar system be incorporated in Canada. Although the Davin Report contributed to the Canadian Government inaugurating a residential school system in the 1880s, the report did not signify the start of Aboriginal residential schools in Canada (Milloy, 1999). There were already four residential schools in existence in Ontario, including the Mohawk Institute, and the Wikwemikong, Mount Elgin, and Shingwauk schools. Furthermore, a number of institutions had already been built in



Western Canada and additional schools were being organized by western missionaries (Milloy, 1999). Thus, the Davin Report represents but one significant milestone in Canada's residential school history. Preceding the Davin Report, imperial policy between the 1830s and the 1850s, as well as federal legislation and programming, further contributed to the development of a national residential school system. Milloy (1999) argued:

The rationale for the development of [Canadian] residential schools ... constituted part of the most extensive and persistent colonial system – one that marginalized Aboriginal communities within its constitutional, legislative, and regulatory structure, stripped them of the power of self-government, and denied them any degree of self-determination.

Thus, the Canadian residential school system represented a prominent component of Canada's assimilative history targeting Aboriginal peoples. In this context, assimilation refers to an explicit, policy-driven approach by the Canadian Government to destroy the cultural heritage and languages of Aboriginal Peoples residing in Canadian territory through forcing Euro-Canadian values (the dominant cultural values influenced by European colonizers and held within Canada) and the English and French languages upon these individuals (Milloy, 1999).

The Canadian residential school system lasted from 1879 to 1986 and was founded and operated as a church-state partnership. In this partnership, the federal government "provided the core funding, set the standards of care, was to supervise the administration of the schools, and controlled the children who were 'wards of [Department of Indian Affairs]'" (Milloy, 1999). The various churches (including the Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, and United denominations) were responsible for the day-to-day operation of the schools. After 1969, the federal government gained sole control of the

residential schools until the program ended in 1986. The existence of Aboriginal residential schools in Canada involved a long history of control by religious missionaries and government officials being exerted over Aboriginal communities (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). Furthermore, these institutions were plagued by malnourishment, neglect, and physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse throughout their existence (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). This paper explores one specific element of this system: the complex role of recreation within Canadian residential schools.

### **The Role of Recreation within North American Aboriginal Schools**

#### **American boarding schools.**

Several studies discuss the role of recreation within American boarding schools (Abraham, 2006; Adams, 1995; Bloom, 1996; Jenkins, 2007; Peavy & Smith, 2007; Gilbert, 2010). These studies explore recreation within American boarding schools from diverse perspectives including the Carlisle Indian Industrial School's football program (Adams, 1995; Jenkins, 2007), the use of recreation to utilize resistance and maintain personal and cultural identities (Abraham, 2006), considerations surrounding the relationship between gender and recreation (Abraham, 2006; Peavy & Smith, 2007), the tensions between Aboriginal culture and boarding school policy (Gilbert, 2010), and the systemic tensions between recreation and identity (Bloom, 1996). Collectively, these studies illustrate the complexity of recreation within the American boarding school system. They also demonstrate that school administrators saw recreation as a tool to support the school systems' assimilationist aims while Aboriginal students viewed recreation as a singular positive experience in their negative boarding school experiences (Adams, 1995; Bloom, 1996; Jenkins, 2007). Many of these authors also argue that boarding school students used recreation to assert their own self-identity, connect across tribal lines, and grow as a people of Aboriginals living

within American territory (Abraham, 2006; Adams, 1995; Bloom, 1996; Peavy & Smith, 2007; Gilbert, 2010).

### **Canadian residential schools.**

Broadly speaking, fewer publications exist exploring recreation's place within Canadian residential schools. Yet, the concept of 'recreation as re-creation' represents a prominent viewpoint held within the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs and notably espoused by former department head, Duncan Campbell Scott surrounding the purpose of instituting recreation within Canadian residential schools (Milloy, 1999). This concept involved the use of recreational activities to aid in the wider school mandate of re-creating or assimilating Aboriginal students attending residential schools through instilling Euro-Canadian values upon them. Furthermore, this process also reduced the influence of Aboriginal customs and values (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996).

Numerous scholars have studied the role of recreation within Canadian residential schools. Miller (1996) devoted a section of his book on the Canadian residential school system to the specific recreational activities undertaken within these schools. His analysis focused on gender playing a prominent role in students' organized and unorganized recreational activities. For instance, male students had access to a wider range of recreational activities including hockey, basketball, football, and baseball. These activities instilled masculine ideas of strength, competitiveness, and honour (Miller, 1996). Female students tended to engage in less-structured activities, such as imaginative play, which were largely invented by the students themselves. Long supervised walks to escape the monotony of residential school life were the main form of structured recreation for female students (Miller, 1996). Female students were barred from activities characterized as masculine, involving aggression, competitiveness, and physical contact, because they conflicted with perceived feminized

qualities (Miller, 1996). However, this is only one reason why female students lacked access to recreational activities. Miller (1996) also argued that like organized recreation, unorganized recreational activities were also heavily gendered towards males. Unorganized recreation occurred during students' limited free time and involved schoolyard games such as "The Bear Game and Cars" (Miller, 1996).

Vermaas (1995) examined the role and impact of leisure activities on Aboriginal students at the Kuper Island Industrial School on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Vermaas (1995) discovered that students performed a range of leisure activities including hiking and playing football, basketball, and soccer. However, they were unable to accurately define the impact of recreational activities on these students, in part, through struggling to determine which activities the Aboriginal students already knew, and which activities they were introduced to at the school. Thus, Vermaas' (1995) work contributes to our understandings of recreation's role with Canadian residential schools, while also leaving numerous core questions unanswered.

Knockwood (2001) explored the experience of Mi'kmaw children at the Shubenacadie Residential School in Nova Scotia. Specifically, Knockwood (2001) outlined the daily schedule at the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, which included two hours set aside for recreation unless it was interrupted by other unscheduled work or school duties. Despite such a time restraint being placed on the students' recreational time, recreation still played an important role in their lives at the residential school. Furthermore, recreation provided students with quality time away from the classroom and enabled them opportunities to build rapport with other students (Knockwood, 2001).

Students at the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School also excelled at competitive sports. For instance, a student who attended the Shubenacadie Indian School in 1929 described his time on the school's baseball team:

Father Pecker picked out the best. We had two teams. We'd walk to [Shubenacadie] and play a game with the white teams from Stewiacke, [Shubenacadie], Milford, and St. Pat's – we played every doggone team there was. Well, when you have 12 year olds who can beat grown men to a score of 20-0 – they must be good. But when Father Mackey came home we played one game and beat the daylights out of them, and do you know what he done? He busted up the team and we never played after that (Knockwood, 2001, p. 71-72).

This reflection illustrates how Aboriginal students at the Shubenacadie Indian school were competitive and skilled athletes, demonstrated the students' abilities to compete with and defeat non-Aboriginal teams of adult athletes, and depicted the school administrators control over Aboriginal student recreational activities. The Shubenacadie Indian School baseball team story relates to similar stories at American institutions where boarding school teams regularly defeated non-Aboriginal teams and created a sense of camaraderie and improved their self-worth (Adams, 1995; Jenkins, 2007; Peavy & Smith, 2007).

Knockwood (2001) also uncovered how imaginative games became necessary for students at the Shubenacadie Indian School, because they lacked access to playground equipment. The students' reliance on imaginative games illustrated both their resourcefulness, as well as the barrier to adequate recreational equipment resulting, in part, from the chronic underfunding within the Canadian residential school system (Knockwood, 2001). These same recreational barriers existed throughout residential school across Canada (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999).

While various studies have critically explored the role recreation played in American boarding schools for the students, this topic requires further exploration within Canadian residential schools. Specifically, the following research questions arise:

(1) What roles did recreation play in Canadian residential schools? (2) How did Aboriginal students experience recreation in these institutions? (3) What values did students report from their recreational experiences? This study addresses these three questions through analyzing student publications at two specific Canadian residential schools published between 1946 and 1958. The resulting findings present specific students' self-reports about their recreational experiences and provide the reader with a greater understanding and critical examination of recreation's place within two residential schools.

### Methodology and Methods

For this study, I employed a qualitative, thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011) to analyze historic data on student recreational experiences within two Canadian residential schools. Furthermore, an archival approach was used to collect relevant data. The following three Canadian archives were accessed because they possess large volumes of Canadian, Aboriginal, and residential school resources: Library and Archives Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives, and the Trent University Archives. Appropriate publications were selected from these archives based on their relevance to the following research questions: (1) What roles did recreation play in Canadian residential schools? (2) How did Aboriginal students experience recreation in these institutions? and (3) What values did students report from their recreational experiences? Thus, student newspapers, yearbooks, and other related publications were targeted through both keyword database searches (using the following search terms: residential school\* + recreation + student\*) and in-person searches. This process resulted in the discovery of: (1) A series of student yearbooks, *The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, from the Mount Elgin Industrial Institute, located southwest of London, Ontario, Canada, and (2) A series of student newspapers, *The Wigwam News*, from the Birtle Indian Residential School,

located in Birtle, Manitoba, Canada. The available documents from both institutions were published between 1946 and 1958.

A broad definition of recreation was employed in this study to capture the diverse student recreational perspectives. This definition involved: Any social or competitive activities discussed by students or otherwise included in the publications beyond academics, chores, and formal school activities. Although this open-ended definition deviates from more structured definitions (Heintzman, 2007; Karlis, 2011) this was done purposefully to best capture the range of recreational activities students chose to self-report in both publications. Furthermore, both publications covered a range of topics surrounding students' residential school experiences including: recreational activities, school events, and academic achievements. However, information involving recreational activities was most common, followed by discussions of school events and academic achievements (e.g. flag days, school vacations, and field trips). Thus, from the students' perspectives, recreation was a prominent component of their school existence.

This thematic analysis process was grounded in a constructionist paradigm, centering on the students' recreational experiences and how these experiences (and their meanings) were communicated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Additionally, the unit of analysis involved artefacts (student publications). Both publications were then verbatim coded and subsequently analyzed using iterative memoing techniques to construct themes, which addressed the primary emergent ideas (Charmaz, 2011). Four themes emerged from these processes and will be explored next.

## Results

### Summary of Findings

Through a thematic analysis of relevant student publications published between 1946 and 1958, I uncovered four emergent themes: recounting

positive school experiences through diverse recreational activities; critiquing school team performances; reporting ironic school cultural practices; and competing administrator influences on student recreational experiences. These themes represent the breadth and depth emerging from both student publications involving: (1) the diverse range of recreational experiences and (2) conceptualizations of the values resulting from these experiences as reported by various individuals.

### Recounting Positive School Experiences Through Diverse Recreational Activities

Within *The Mount Elgin Sputnik* (the school's yearbook), various recreational activities were discussed at length. For instance, student reporter, Teresa Ireland (1958) reported: "In May we had our [track and] field day at Sarnia with Walpole, Sarnia, Moraviantown, Kettlepoint, and Caradoo taking part. Although we came second again behind Walpole, we [brought] home a lot of ribbons and points." This excerpt was followed by a list of athletic accomplishments by the Mount Elgin Industrial Institute students at this event, thus depicting the athletic prowess of these Aboriginal students.

Furthermore, the section titled, "Our Graduates Remember", consisting of graduating students reflecting upon their time at the Mount Elgin Industrial Institute, contained numerous reflections centred on recreational pursuits. Ireland stated: "Sometimes the girls from London play against our girls team. They thought they would win but it turned out a great surprise to both teams when our team won" (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, 1958). Joyce Chrisjohn also reflected upon her own memories: "The ballgames, parties and band concerts were enjoyed by all those who watched and those who took part. The times when we tried to win the cup for our school and tried to improve it will long be remembered" (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, 1958). Virgil Wilson rather focused on the band and field days in his retrospection:



"Besides this my school life at Mt. Elgin hasn't been very exciting. I went with the band a lot of times to a lot of places and had quite a bit of fun. I have gone to all the field days that have been held. The first one was at Walpole, then at Muncey and after that in Sarnia. This fall the field day will be held in Moraviantown on Friday, October 10<sup>th</sup>. I do hope I can go" (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, 1958).

Overall, these three students revealed the diversity of recreational activities they valued: ranging from sports to music to parties. Additionally, these students differed in the values they placed upon different recreational pursuits; Ireland and Wilson focused exclusively on the competitive and non-competitive features of their recreational activities respectively, while Chrisjohn articulated how she valued both the competitive and non-competitive aspects of her preferred recreational activities. Thus, these excerpts depicted the Mount Elgin Industrial Institute as one where both diverse recreational activities and diverse values were at the core of the students' school experiences.

Student recreational exploits were also firmly entrenched within the Birtle Indian Residential School's school newspaper, *The Wigwam News*. Specifically, the students' athletic exploits and the role of the student council in organizing school parties and other functions were featured throughout the paper. For instance, the results from the annual Birtle district school sports day included students from the Birtle Indian Residential School "winning first prize in the parade and marching event and faring well in the ball tournament for each gender," (*The Wigwam News*, 1946). Similar to other studies exploring Aboriginal sport and recreation (Abraham, 2006; Adams, 1995; Jenkins, 2007; Knockwood, 2001; Peavy & Smith, 2007), Aboriginal athletes were explicitly compared to their white counterparts in these instances. This example confirms how *The Wigwam News* also reported positive recreational

exploits, specifically competitive successes in the above example.

### **Critiquing School Team Performances**

*The Wigwam News* was also particularly critical of the Birtle Indian Residential School's competitive, travelling sports teams, more so than *The Mount Elgin Sputnik*. Specifically, the school's various hockey teams were susceptible to targeted critiques of their performances. For instance, when the juvenile hockey team lost a series of games, *The Wigwam News* (1954) account read: "None of these three teams were altogether too strong to beat but the only thing our side lacked was the real determination to do their best and try to keep up the reputation of the Birtle Indian School hockey teams high." Another harsh criticism occurred when both the bantam and pee wee hockey teams lost a series of games: "Both teams have played but not as they really should. The players on both teams wouldn't put everything they had into the game. When they did put on a little pressure it was too late" (*The Wigwam News*, 1954). These accounts demonstrated the level of criticism received by the school's hockey teams, particularly after losses. Not only did hockey appear to be a prevalent recreational activity within the Birtle Indian Residential School, it also further complicates our understanding of residential school recreational activities regarding how competitive team sports, specifically hockey, were largely valued based on game performances and open to targeted public criticism.

### **Reporting Ironic School Cultural Practices**

The inclusion of music as a common activity at the Birtle Indian Residential School represents another example of diverse recreational exploits being featured in both student publications. *The Wigwam News* reported a concert hosted by the Birtle Indian Residential School, which was open to the public on May 1, 1954. This concert represented the first time that the school attempted such a performance, which included attractive and authentic costumes, a pow-wow, and traditional dances (*The*

*Wigwam News*, 1954). This performance illustrated the role that music, art, and dance played in the recreational experiences at the Birtle Indian Residential School through the school's Aboriginal students' actions being thrust into the spotlight to entertain their non-Aboriginal audience (*The Wigwam News*, 1954). The emphasis of this performance, involving Aboriginal cultural and traditional components, appeared to contradict the administrations overarching assimilationist goals (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). Broadly speaking, while residential school administrators strove to separate students from their Aboriginal cultural practices and languages (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999), the same taboo cultural practices were on display during this concert. Thus, this concert illustrates one example of how the actions within Canadian residential schools were rife with irony.

#### **Competing Administrator Influences on Student Recreational Experiences**

School administrators also figured prominently in the students' recreational activities. Ireland stated: "Last week some of the children went down to the river to swim. They all seemed to enjoy themselves very much, but last year, the principal came down to help teach us to swim and he made a success of it" (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, 1958). Ireland's favourable reflection on the school's former principal (Rev. E.E.M. Joblin) was further illustrated through a dedication of the school's first yearbook in his memory:

Mr. Joblin, all the pupils of Mt. Elgin are dedicating our first yearbook to you in memory of all the happy times we had together when you were principal. To many of us you grew to be just like a pal, who took a sincere interest in us, and who joined with us in swimming, skating, playing rugby, and baseball, always giving and taking your share of the roughing up (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, 1958).

School administrators also influenced recreational activities at the Mount Elgin Industrial Institute School through enforcing good behaviour. *The Mount Elgin Sputnik* (1958) reported how the Mount Elgin Student Council was actively involved in organizing various recreational activities, including the Halloween and Valentine parties. While the student council organized these events, the school's administrators monitored them closely, emphasizing the requirement for good student behaviour leading to, and during these events (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, 1958). This tension was captured by Doreen Doxtator in a section of the yearbook titled, "Social Life":

The first party was a Hallowe'en party held on November first, nineteen fifty-seven. We were having a ball when Mr. Devenish (the school's principal) rushed in and ordered everybody out. We were all stunned when he told us that the windows in the girl's washroom had been broken. We started sadly on our way home (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, 1958).

Doxtator continued: "The next party was a Valentine party held on February 14, 1958. Every boy who danced got a chocolate bar, and all the girls had a good time shaking it up. Mr. Devenish was very pleased with our excellent behaviour" (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, 1958). Thus, the need for proper student behaviour was an underlying requirement for the student council to hold recreational events, such as parties. Doxtator's writings illustrate both the influence the Mount Elgin Industrial Institute's principal held over specific recreational opportunities, as well as Doxtator's understanding of this power dynamic and ability to publicly report her observations to the wider student body. Although both principals influenced their schools' recreational activities greatly, the above examples illustrate student perceptions of the diverse favourable and unfavourable influences by these particular school administrators.

## Discussion

### Valuing Student Yearbooks and Newspapers as Sources of Data

In this study, data were collected from past student yearbooks and newspapers. These sources represent one of the few available outlets of primary source historical information on residential school students' recreational experiences (Aside from the secondary source publications presented in this paper's literature review) (Abraham, 2006; Adams, 1995; Jenkins, 2007; Knockwood, 2001; Peavy & Smith, 2007). Thus, *The Mount Elgin Sputnik* and *The Wigwam News* present readers with access to: (1) An overall understanding of the recreational landscape in both institutions during this time period, (2) An entry point into uncovering how students experienced recreation, and (3) How the values surrounding these experiences were reported by various individuals.

These sources represent a diverse platform for uncovering rich, deep insights. Furthermore, these publications are viewed by the author as documents constructed for specific purposes (Scott, 1990). Due to the historic nature of both student publications, I may only speculate how they were constructed and for what purposes. One assumption involves the inevitability that school administrators, principals, and teachers played an active role in the creation and copy editing of these documents. Thus, multiple perspectives and frames of reference invariably influenced these publications. Considering such assumptions, these publications may then be viewed as dynamic, multi-contextual sources in which to explore, through qualitative research, the various multi-layered understandings existing within specific Aboriginal students' recreational experiences, wider perspectives surrounding the place of recreation within certain Canadian residential schools, and how the values surrounding these experiences are reported by individuals. Consequently, both publications provide much value

to understanding the role of recreation within Canadian residential schools.

### Making Sense of the Themes

The findings from both residential school student publications (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik* and *The Wigwam News*) illustrate the existence of complex student recreational landscapes. These complexities involve both the type of activities students performed and reported engaging in (ranging from various sports to music and parties), as well as the specific values students placed upon such activities through their recollections. Within sports, students discussed either the competitive or non-competitive features of their sporting activities; in some cases, espousing the benefits of both. For music and parties, students presented a range of values involving sense of belonging, ironic public displays of Aboriginal cultural practices, and making reference to administrators exerting their influence over particular events.

Additional insights can be discovered through unpacking the particular sections in each student publication where students discussed recreation. For instance, *The Mount Elgin Sputnik's* "Our Graduates Remember" sections contained many reflective discussions by students involving their recreational experiences. The inclusion of these positive student recreational accounts is understandable considering the implicit goals behind the creation of such a retrospective section (to present positive student experiences rather than any negative occurrences). Again, it is unclear what role school administrators played in the construction of these sections, or if students presented their personal positive accounts of their own free will. Nonetheless, the fact that so many students used these opportunities to espouse their enjoyment of diverse recreational activities in both schools illustrates the prominent position recreation held within these graduating students' perceptions of their cumulative residential school experience. Overall, these positive accounts enhance our understanding of the residential school

experience and complicate the dominant negative image of residential school life discussed earlier (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999).

Furthermore, the students' recreational experiences cannot be characterized as belonging within a positive/negative experiential dichotomy. Rather, these experiences exist along a spectrum ranging from overwhelmingly positive accounts, to sharp critiques of individual and team performances. Also, specific student accounts illustrate the multi-layered considerations surrounding student recreational experiences. For example, Virgil Wilson juxtaposed his positive band and field day exploits against the remainder of his school existence through stating: "Besides this [his recreational experiences] my school life at Mt. Elgin hasn't been very exciting" (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, 1958). Thus, student accounts of their recreational experiences provide access to better understanding student perceptions beyond their recreational experiences, surrounding their wider school existence, thereby further enriching our knowledge of such institutions. Moreover, Wilson's comments speak to the level of freedom students had in presenting a range of insights, some of which were not overly positive about their school experiences in general. Although both publications were mainly positive, Wilson's comments illustrate the complexity of student perspectives as well as raising questions surrounding just how much control school administrators and teachers maintained over both publications.

Additional student reports further expanded our understanding of recreation's role within residential schools. Such examples included the critical coverage of the Birtle Indian Residential Schools' hockey teams and the emphasis on good behaviour by the schools' principal surrounding the Halloween and Valentine parties. In *The Wigwam News* (1954), the authorship of the articles criticizing the hockey team's performances is unknown; specifically whether students, teachers, or administrators wrote

them. Yet, these articles portray the boy's hockey teams as being held to high standards through representing the school in games and competitions against other residential schools and non-Aboriginal opponents. Further, these teams are characterized as competitive, travelling teams (*The Wigwam News*, 1954). The existence of these teams expands our understanding of the recreational landscape, specifically within the Birtle School. While the majority of recreational accounts in both student publications focus on non-competitive recreational activities mainly in a positive manner, these articles illustrate both the existence of competitive recreational activities, as well as higher standards of performance and public criticisms targeted at competitive school teams. Thus, the spectrum of recreational pursuits involved: (1) the type of activity, (2) the level of competition, and (3) the existence of, type, and severity of criticism directed at the individuals and teams in certain instances. Also, despite the lack of an identifiable author for these articles, the value of these emergent insights persists. Rather, future questions arise surrounding the transparency of authorship within these publications and the challenge of appropriately representing residential school students' recreational experiences

Insights involving the diverse ways school administrators influenced student recreational experiences can also be gleaned from these publications. The reference to Principal Devenish's emphasis on good behaviour at both the Halloween and Valentine parties represents an example of how recreation was viewed as a privilege at the Mount Elgin Industrial Institute. In this case, the Halloween dance was ended early due to apparent vandalism. In the student article, the Valentine party was presented as an award for good behaviour since October. Further, the students' good behaviour during this party was emphasized in the same article (*The Mount Elgin Sputnik*, 1958). This example illustrates how recreation was framed as a privilege that could

be taken away if certain standards were not upheld and how school administrators held influence and power over students' access to certain recreational activities. While the focus of this paper involves the students' reports of their recreational exploits in these two student publications, the influence of teachers and administrators must also be considered to broaden our perspective.

### Conclusion

In this exploratory study, I analyzed the diverse recreational experiences of residential school students as reported in two student publications: *The Mount Elgin Sputnik* (Mount Elgin Industrial Institute) and *The Wigwam News* (Birtle Indian Residential School) published between 1946 and 1958. Following a comprehensive thematic analysis of the publications' content, it was determined that recreation influenced the students' lives in many different ways, not simply surrounding the recreative and assimilative aims outlined by school administrators (Miller, 1996, Milloy, 1999). Specifically, increased understandings of: (1) recreations place within residential schools, (2) Aboriginal students' recreational experiences, and (3) how the values surrounding these experiences were reported by students have been presented. Student recreational experiences revealed multi-layered understandings ranging from: overall positive accounts, to recreation encompassing both competitive and non-competitive activities and being conceptualized and reported differently. These newfound understandings of residential school student recreational practices and perceptions provide recreation practitioners, policy makers, and Aboriginal communities with information to assist in understanding how the legacies emerging from the Canadian residential school system influenced, and continue to influence Aboriginal Peoples throughout Canada today.

This paper's findings are not representative of wider Canadian or North American Aboriginal students' institutional recreational experiences.

Rather, this qualitative, exploratory study used primary source student publications from two Canadian residential schools to create a rich picture of particular recreational landscapes. It is my hope that this research will spur on future research areas including: explorations of regional and gendered differences, in-depth interviews with residential school survivors to uncover their recreational experiences more deeply, and to investigate linkages between recreation's role in Canadian residential schools with recreational patterns within contemporary Aboriginal communities. To further expand our knowledge in this area, the facilitation of partnerships with Aboriginal communities is necessary to engage in more critical research methodologies to better understand this legacy and create more healthy, physically active Aboriginal populations in Canada moving forward.

### References

- Abraham, E. V. (2006). Mandolins and pigskins: Creation of community at the Grand Junction Indian School 1886-1910. *Annals of Wyoming: The Wyoming History Journal*, 27-38.
- Adams, D. W. (1995). *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Bloom, J. (1996). Show what an Indian can do: Sports, memory, and ethnic identity at Federal Indian Boarding Schools. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 35(3).
- Braun, V & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Dussault, R., & Erasmus, G. (1996). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Looking forward, looking back*. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.



- Charmaz, K. (2011). A constructivist grounded theory analysis of losing and regaining a valued self. In F. J. Wertz, K. Charmaz, L. M. McMullen, R. Josselson, R. Anderson, & E. McSpaddon (Eds). *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis: Phenomenological Psychology, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, and Intuitive Inquiry*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Denzin N. & Lincoln, Y. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). London: Sage.
- Elias, B., Mignone, J., Hall, M., Hong, S. P., Hart, L., & Sareen, J. (2012). Trauma and suicide behaviour histories among a Canadian indigenous population: An empirical exploration of the potential role of Canada's residential school system. *Social Science & Medicine*, 74(10), 1560-1569.
- Forsyth, J., & Heine, M. (2008). Sites of meaning, meaningful sites? Sport and recreation for Aboriginal youth in inner city Winnipeg, Manitoba. *Native Studies Review*, 17(2), 99-113.
- Fox, K. M., Ryan, S., Dyck, J. V., Chivers, B., Chuchmach, L., & Quesnel, S. (1998). Cultural perspectives, resilient Aboriginal communities, and recreation. *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*, 23(2), 147-191.
- Furniss, E. (1995). *Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School*. Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Gilbert, M. S. (2010). Hopi Footraces and American Marathons, 1912-1930. *The American Studies Association*, 62: 77-101.
- Grant, A. (1996). *No End of Grief: Indian Residential Schools in Canada*. Winnipeg, MB: Pemmican Publications, Inc.
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M. and Namey, E. E. (2011). *Applied thematic analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Iwasaki, Y., & Bartlett, J. G. (2006). Culturally meaningful leisure as a way of coping with stress among aboriginal individuals with diabetes. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 38(3), 321-328.
- Jenkins, S. (2007). *The real all Americans: The team that changed a game, a people, a nation*. New York: Random House Publishing Inc..
- Karlis, G. (2011) *Leisure and recreation in Canadian society: An introduction*. Toronto, ON: Thompson Educational Pub.
- Kelly, J. R. (2012). *Leisure* (Ed. 4). Urbana, IL: Sagamore Publishing.
- Kirmayer, L., Simpson, C., & Cargo, M. (2003). Healing traditions: Culture, community and mental health promotion with Canadian Aboriginal peoples. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 11(s1), S15-S23.
- Knockwood, I. (2001). *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia*. Black Point, NS: Roseway Publishing.
- Heintzman, P. (2007). Defining leisure. In R. E. McCarville & K. MacKay (Eds.), *Leisure for Canadians* (pp. 1-12). State College, PA: Venture Publishing.
- Miller, J. R. (1996). *Shingwauk's Vision: A history of native residential schools*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Milloy, J. S. (1999). *A national crime: The Canadian government and the residential school system – 1879 to 1986*. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press.
- Peavy, L. & Smith U. (2007). ““Leav[ing] the white[s] .. far behind them’: The girls from Fort Shaw (Montana) Indian School, basketball champions of the 1904 world’s fair.” 24: 819-840.

Scott, J. (1990). *A matter of record: Documentary sources in social research*. Cambridge, GB: Polity Press.

The Mount Elgin Sputnik. Box 12, Folder 1. Mount Elgin Indian Residential School: Yearbook 1957-58. Trent University Archives, Peterborough, ON. 21 Jan 2012.

The Wigwam News. (1946). Box 12, Folder 1. W.M.S. (W.D.): National executive secretary: Correspondence with Principal, Birtle School: 1946-1948. Trent University Archives, Peterborough, ON. 21 Jan 2012.

The Wigwam News. (1954). Box 12, Folder 1. W.M.S. (W.D.): National Executive Secretary: Correspondence with Principal, Birtle School: 1952-1954. Trent University Archives, Peterborough, ON. 21 Jan 2012.